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Text:

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 04902

SIPDIS  
CXABU:

ACTION: ECON  
INFO: FCS DCM MGT POL P/M AMB

DISSEMINATION: ECON  
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: DCM: MQINN  
DRAFTED: ECON: BDEMONTLUZIN,  
CLEARED: MGT: DSMOKERALI, ECON: OJOHN

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2605  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 5603

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 004902

SIPDIS

USDA/FAS FOR CMP/DLP/WETZEL

E.O. 129589: N/A  
TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [TC](#)  
SUBJECT: UAEG'S PREPARATIONS FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA

REF: A)STATE 209622, B)STATE 153483, C)STATE 151549,  
D) ABU DHABI 04225

1. (U) In response to the questions posed Reftel A regarding the UAEG's efforts to protect against avian influenza (AI) and its capability to respond to a pandemic, the following information is provided.

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Preparedness  
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2. (U) The UAEG has formed a National Avian Influenza Emergency Committee (NAIEC) composed of representatives from the Environment Agency, the General Authority for Health Services, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Health Authority, General Secretariat of Municipalities and the military to develop a comprehensive plan to prevent and/or manage an AI pandemic in the UAE. Majid Al Mansouri, Secretary General of the Abu Dhabi Environment Agency, chairs the committee. Weekly meetings are held with all members of the committee. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, also attends the meetings once a month. The UAEG's plan is based on the WHO Health and Medical Services Contingency Plan for an Influenza Pandemic. The UAEG has a flow sheet in Arabic detailing what their response will be in various stages of pandemic preparation. The flow sheet details procedures for preparation for both an avian epidemic and a human epidemic. Embosfs along with USDA consultants reviewed the flow chart with Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries (MAF) officials with regard to an avian outbreak, but were not given a copy of this internal UAEG document.

-Prevention of an avian epidemic involves measures such as banning the importation of live birds from countries that have reported cases of High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1. The MAF is quarantining and testing non-poultry birds,

particularly falcons, which arrive at major ports of entry and is also coordinating inspections of live bird markets, pet stores and commercial poultry farms. The Abu Dhabi Environmental Agency has closed live bird markets both in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain and instructed owners to confine domestic birds indoors as an additional precaution against inadvertent infection by migratory birds. The UAEG established and broadly publicized a consumer hotline. Reportedly, response time on calls to the hotline is slow.

-The UAEG is capable of implementing any AI plan developed. This is a country rich in fiscal resources and appears to have the political will to address the AI issue in the event of an avian or human epidemic.

-The UAEG will likely be forthcoming in reporting cases of AI in humans, but not in avian populations due to sensitivities concerning the falconry industry. (Falcons are kept as pets and used in hunting by Gulf Arabs. The most expensive falcons cost \$30-40K.) The U.S. could offer more technical assistance to encourage transparency and prompt reporting of AI.

-The UAEG appears to be taking the threat of AI seriously with preparation for a pandemic high on the UAEG's list of priorities. The key go-to person is Majid Al Mansouri, Secretary General of the Abu Dhabi Environmental Agency, who heads the AI committee. He reports directly to the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince. However, if dealing with live avians, the go-to person is Asst. U/S Abdullah Abdul Azziz, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. The country has allocated 35 million dirhams (9.5 million USD) to combat AI via preventive programs and post-detection eradication measures.

-UAE national laws restrict the Federal Ministry of Agriculture's ability to confiscate privately-held exotic birds. However, municipalities are not constrained by this legal restriction and can, and have, confiscated pet birds and poultry as a risk reduction measure among domestic avian and poultry populations.

-The UAEG is in regular contact with the WHO and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and has repeatedly stated that they are following WHO planning and response guidelines. UAE officials have met with embassy staff on several occasions and have been helpful and responsive. Teams of AI experts from the US, the FAO, Belgium and Australia evaluated the UAEG's AI action plan and its implementation thus far. The UAEG remains very interested in more bilateral assistance from the USG and is also coordinating a multilateral approach with other GCC countries to promote prevention, detection and eradication of AI H5N1 within the region.

-The UAE's annual Flu Vaccine Program is implemented through hospitals, clinics, and the preventive medicine clinic. The Flu vaccine given is Aventis Pasteur Vaxigrip, which is produced in Lyon, France. No flu vaccine is produced locally. The UAE does not produce AI H5N1 vaccine for poultry, but likely would once such vaccine is developed.

-The Abu Dhabi Environment Agency produced and distributed an informational brochure on AI to consumers throughout the UAE while the MAF issues a separate brochure to the poultry sector. AI has figured prominently in the newspapers, although comprehensive information on a) the potential avenues for AI to spread or b) basic preventive health measures consumers could adopt is not well disseminated. Many sectors of the population are receiving some information about the disease, but there is a risk that many third-country nationals will remain ill-informed.

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Surveillance/Detection  
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13. (SBU) Avian surveillance is ongoing in commercial poultry, imported avian and live bird markets. However, the Ministry of Agriculture does not have strong diagnostic capabilities and relies almost exclusively on a reference laboratory in England to analyze samples. The USDA is addressing this dependency on outside resources by sponsoring local Ministry officials for training in the U.S. The November visit of USDA officials revealed that MAF field officials were applying a rapid response

ELIZA test, designed for detecting H5N1 in falcons, to all avian species. Officials seemed unaware that such a test will always generate a false negative in an infected bird. During an interview, MAF officials confirmed that technical advisors from the Food and Agricultural Organization, Belgium and Australia had also identified this field test as erroneous. The MAF explained that this test was utilized on the order of the National Avian Influenza Emergency Committee as the official test to be given throughout the country.

-Testing of humans can be done at Sheikh Khalifa Medical Center. The center already has the technical equipment needed to run the verification tests for H5N1 in samples. Reagents for the PCR of H5N1 have been ordered and are expected to arrive in 4 weeks. The GAHS has a contract with a laboratory in the UK for viral cultures needed for verification.

-There are critical gaps in the UAE's detection capabilities. The most pressing gap in the UAE's outbreak response capability is the threat of hospitals being overwhelmed by patients in the event of an outbreak. There are currently 55-72 beds designated for AI isolation. In the event of an outbreak, it is expected that the military would be able to increase that capacity. All AI cases would be treated at government hospitals. It is not clear how many of those are negative flow rooms. However, the ICU beds in the government hospitals here often have terminally ill VIP patients who remain in the ICU for months to years, taxing the potential response of the health care system. While the UAE has good hospitals and equipment, an AI epidemic could quickly overwhelm the health system.

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Response/Containment  
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14. (U) The UAE public health sector has 10,000 doses of Tamiflu stockpiled. They have ordered 4 million more doses, expecting the first 1 million to arrive in March. One source reported that the Health Authority has increased its order to 10 million doses. The country also has stockpiles of antibiotics to treat secondary infections.

-The UAE has sufficient supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in place for its medical staff, and have ordered more as a back-up. The Ministry of Agriculture does not have any PPE for its employees. Of the Municipalities, only Abu Dhabi is known to have a limited quantity of PPE for its Department of Agriculture veterinarians.

-The rapid response capacity for an outbreak of AI is based on police and military support. Existing Ministry of Agriculture guidelines would be the basis for any action taken related to culling, facility sanitizing and animal movement control in the event of an outbreak among avian populations, although no official plan has been developed. The Ministry of Agriculture appears willing to quarantine poultry and falcons, which are the primary vector risk for the disease into the country's poultry sector--aside from migratory fowl.

-The Health Authority and Military will likely work together in the event of a human outbreak. Quarantine measures are recognized as the appropriate course of action, but details on how such measures would be implemented are still under development. We expect that the UAE health system could be quickly overwhelmed in the event of a regional pandemic, simply because of the sheer numbers of desperately ill persons who would be present at hospitals. The health care that hospitalized patients generally receive here is of good quality based on world standards.

-The UAEG is willing to impose quarantines. It is unclear how these quarantines will be implemented, but it is likely that the military would assist. It is unclear if quarantine mandates could effectively control the movement of VIPs or other elite segments of local society. However, it is likely that the UAEG would be highly proactive in closing schools and banning public gatherings. UAE officials have indicated that air travel could also be halted.

